

The
Poetry of Abuse
Collection



Selected poems by a
domestic violence survivor

Poetry of Abuse Collection
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For more information on The Ripple Effect, visit www.the-ripple-effect.info.

To arrange an interview, workshop, or conference presentation by the author, contact (408) 225-2381.

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Poetry of Abuse
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Selected poems by
Christine Hagion Rzepka

Including:

Feelings on a Carousel
Encased in a Box
I, The Butterfly
The Rose
The Bridge, Continually Burning
Survivor
Broken
Wounded

FEELINGS ON A CAROUSEL

*This poem was written early in the healing process.
It was only years later the author realized it describes the Cycle of Violence.*

Feelings
 riding on a carousel
Rising in heights of ecstasy
 only to fall
 to the depths of despair.

I am the gentle rider
 and you, the wild stallion
 prancing to the melody
of this circular utopia.

We go around and round,
 endlessly spinning, reeling in circles
in cycles, a series of ups & downs
 forever riding, yet
 never quite reaching our destination.

Feelings,
 yours and mine,
riding on a carousel...
see my smile light my face,
 watch my tears as they fall—
As I reach out to lift you up,
 you only let me down.

Christine Hagion
May 1983

ENCASED IN A BOX

*This poem was written to describe how a battered woman loses her identity
in the midst of her abusive relationship.*

I was whole, loving
trusting you.
Seduced by my anxieties
I merged with you
 and lost my identity.
For in your eyes, I
 do not exist.

I became the mirror of your image of me
having no self outside you.
 Your world became my reason for being—
 your happiness was my only concern,
your disappointment, my failure.

 I am ornamental,
 yet valueless:
 a mere reflection of
what and who I once was...

Your lover,
 Now, your hostage
 imprisoned in this framework—
 broken.

 All that is left are splinters,
jagged pieces of glass,
 the fragments of my being
Encased in a box,
 tightly wrapped and sealed
with masking tape of false bravado.
 Appearing whole,
 yet remaining shattered.

Christine Hagion
Winter 1984

I, THE BUTTERFLY

*Victims of domestic violence often feel trapped in their relationship.
This poem addresses the feelings of yearning for freedom from abuse.*

Long ago,
A woman in love existed
free, and softly
I, the butterfly
with golden wings
flew into the trap of your open arms,
attracted and enraptured by your spell.

With seductive mystery
you spun the cocoon,
enveloping me within your love,
lulling me to complacency
with your sweetly disguised whispers
till I regressed to the poise of a caterpillar
with nonexistent grace,
lethargically inching along
going nowhere
but to hide in the leaves....

And deep within my heart, I yearn
to fly free again
alone and unhindered
high in the sky,
touching the clouds
exploring my world
rediscovering myself in the
metamorphosis of growth.

I, the butterfly
a creature of beauty
and capable of flight, I
break through the smothering cocoon
and take to my wings
to fly among those free in heart.

Christine Hagion
Spring 1985

THE ROSE

*As part of her healing, the survivor must mourn the loss of the relationship,
even if it was abusive. It is hard to let go of someone you love.
Many well-meaning loved ones may not understand this,
but the grieving process is critical for the survivor
to be able to let go of the past and embrace her future.*

On a sunny Spring morning,
a gold rose opens
to the beauty of the day—
to the warm gentle breeze
and the sweet, melodic tune of the chirping birds,

The long stem, intricately woven,
its glory set
into a beautiful bouquet
of baby's breath, lace, and ribbon—
symbolic of love's vows to be eternal.

Time goes on, the glory of the rose fades,
to brown, wilted petals
that once spoke of love's great passion.
Pressed in a book, long forgotten.

Opened years later, the rose is dead
its life drained away
as did the promise of love it once witnessed.
It lives on, only
in bittersweet memory.

Christine Hagion
Summer 1984

THE BRIDGE, CONTINUALLY BURNING

As a survivor moves along in her healing process, she comes to a stage where she resolves to never again allow herself to consider going back to the abusive relationship. While it is a slow and painful process, this is a necessary step. It is also one she revisits again and again, as a reminder to herself to never again become a victim of abuse.

Memories of years gone by
the seductive swirl of ashes in the sunlight
blowing about in the cold wind,
bringing to mind
 the bridge, long ago burned.....

A wooden bridge of love
 spanning the chasm between you and me
seemingly strong and enduring
 yet splintering, crumbling,
 not able to withstand
the burdensome weight
 of abusive elements.

Remembering, I see the bridge,
flames leaping and dancing happily
ever burning, destroying
 the destructive memories.

How cleansing and soothing was
 the charred wood, the smell of smoke
 purging my soul of pain
 in the all--consuming fire...
Only ashes remain as evidence.

Years later, the howling wind
scatters the melancholy ashes of my memory
--a bittersweet smell in the icy air,
I close my eyes to shut out the pain
and recall once more
 The Bridge, continually burning
 never again to be crossed...
Engulfed in flames
that, in my mind,
 can never be extinguished.

Christine Hagion
Spring 1985

SURVIVOR

*This poem was written specifically for the
Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Council's Clothesline Project.
It tells of a domestic homicide survivor's story
and of the enduring legacy of domestic violence.*

... from a pool of blood
I emerged
my body fractured,
my soul wounded...

you left my motionless carcass, thinking me dead
yet I escaped from your murderous rage
I slipped though your possessive clutches.

You can no longer control me.

The child in me you sought to kill
lives on, victorious

You will never see your daughter.
Never witness her graduation,
never give her away at her wedding,
never look into her eyes and see
the fire within

Never explain to her innocent heart
why you tried to snuff out her life
before it had even begun.....

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Fall 2000

BROKEN

This poem was written for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, 2000

Broken...

your promises
to love, to honor, to cherish
to not hurt
to not hit
 ...again
to listen

Broken...

my jaw, my knee, my arm, my eardrum, my lip
my heart

Broken...

my trust in you
 in others
 in myself

Broken...

my dreams
our love
our future

Broken...

my self
my being
my spirit
my will to live

Broken...

by you

Christine Hagion
Fall 2000

WOUNDED

Until recently, domestic violence was considered only in terms of physical abuse resulting in injury. However, many battered women recount that the verbal abuse they suffered was even more hurtful than the physical blows. In the words of one survivor, "Sometimes I wished he would just hit me and get it over with. That would have been so much easier than dealing with the ongoing verbal abuse." Broken bones heal and bruises fade, but words disguised as weapons wound the very soul.

The bodies of the broken ones
lay helpless, trampled
...again
on the battlefield
wincing, bloodied, throbbing with pain
unable to escape
to safety.

Unexploded bombs
of unresolved issues
scattered in plain sight
in the battleground
that has become our home.

Vulnerable to attack
from all sides, at any moment
I retreat, wounded
From the land mine that is your heart.

All this carnage
--so much devastation
by one man, so heavily armoured
wielding a solitary weapon:
your tongue.

Feb. 2004
Christine Hagion Rzepka

About The Author

Christine Hagion Rzepka is a survivor of child abuse and attempted incest. In her adolescence, she was a witness to the domestic violence directed toward her mother by her stepfather. When she was 15, she was raped by her stepbrother, resulting in a miscarriage. At age 16, she entered the foster care system as a result of her brother's attempts to murder her.

Later, as an adult, Christine fell in love and married a man who later became abusive. Within months, he had dislocated her jaw, broken her wrist, and injured both her knees to keep her from running away from him. One night in a murderous rage, after beating her for hours, he strangled her and left her for dead – but she didn't die. She regained consciousness hours later and fled to a battered women's shelter, five months pregnant and with several broken bones.

Knowing that her abuser would not be content to let her go, and believing his threats to hunt her down and kill her if she ever left him, Christine changed her name to protect her own identity and that of her unborn child. She relocated several hundreds of miles away for her safety and even had reconstructive surgery to repair the damage to her face, which had the happy consequence of also changing her appearance.

Her child miraculously survived the attempted murder. Christine has worked hard to rebuild her life, and struggled to put herself through school as a single mother, earning both her bachelor's and master's degrees. Christine has remarried, and now enjoys a loving, nonviolent family relationship with her husband, two adult daughters, and her son-in-law. She is a graduate of Impact School of Ministry in San Jose, and is pursuing her doctorate.

Christine has been working with victims of abuse for over 20 years, and founded The Ripple Effect in 1998 to focus on the prevention of domestic violence. She has served on the Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Council since 2002, and on the Family/Domestic Violence Prevention Advisory Board for the City of San José since its inception.

The Poetry of Abuse Collection, which began as her attempts to find release and healing through writing poetry, has been shared nationally and is utilized by domestic violence programs across the country to raise awareness of the issue and to educate the public.

Christine is available to speak at workshops, conferences and church retreats.